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(54) **ELECTRONIC BIASING CIRCUIT FOR
CONSTANT TRANSCONDUCTANCE**

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G05F 3/24	(2006.01)
H03F 1/22	(2006.01)
H03F 1/30	(2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**

CPC .. **H03F 3/16** (2013.01); **G05F 3/24** (2013.01);
H03F 1/223 (2013.01); **H03F 1/301** (2013.01);
H03F 2200/18 (2013.01); **H03F 2200/447**
(2013.01); **H03F 2200/456** (2013.01)

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USPC 330/288; 323/315, 316
See application file for complete search history.

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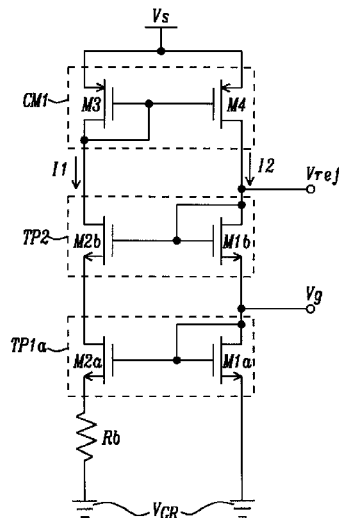
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ABSTRACT

An electronic biasing circuit provides a DC bias voltage to a circuit to be biased. The biasing circuit has a first transistor and a second transistor. A gate of the first transistor is connected to a gate of the second transistor and supplies the DC bias voltage. A source of the first transistor is connected to a supply reference voltage. A source of the second transistor is connected to the supply reference voltage via a resistor element. The currents flowing through the first and second transistor are forced to be equal. A third transistor is connected in series with the first transistor and a fourth transistor is connected in series with the second transistor. Currents flowing through the third and fourth transistors are forced to be equal.

32 Claims, 6 Drawing Sheets



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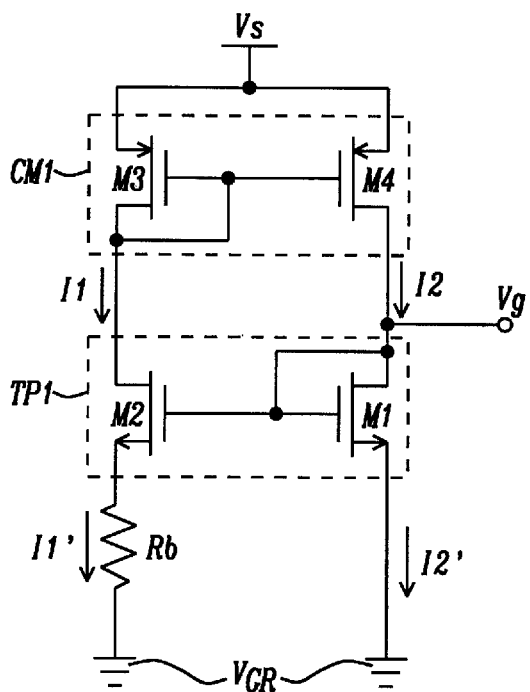


FIG. 1

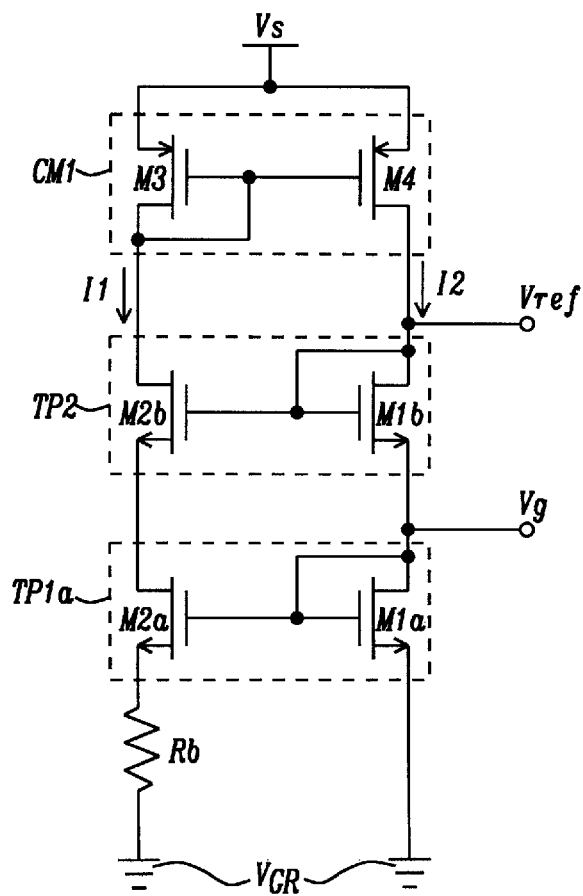


FIG. 2

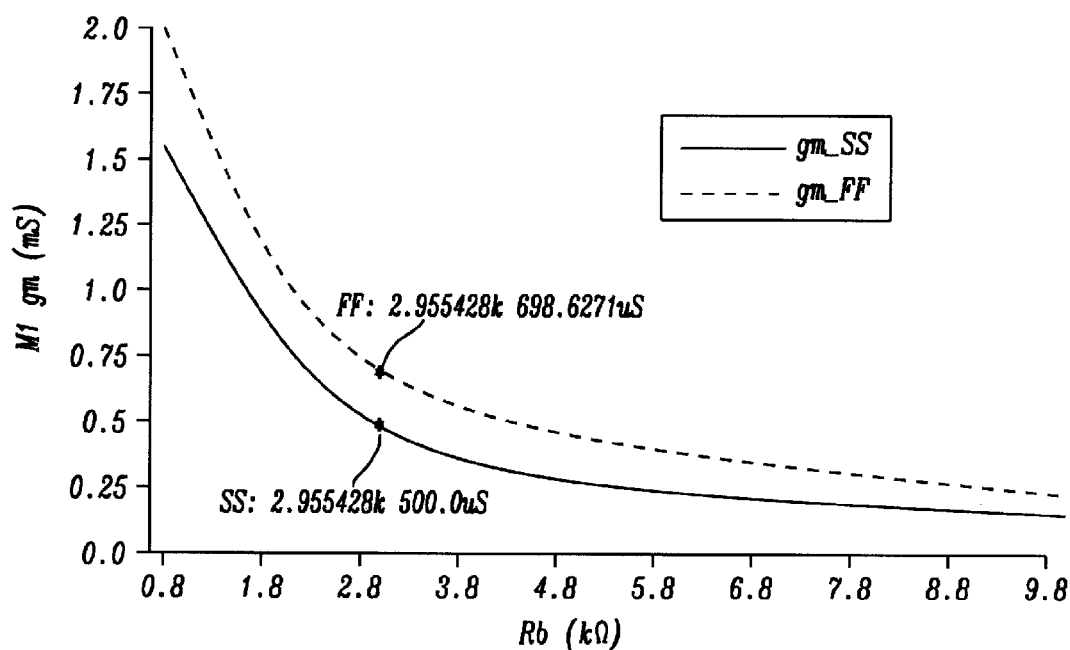


FIG. 3

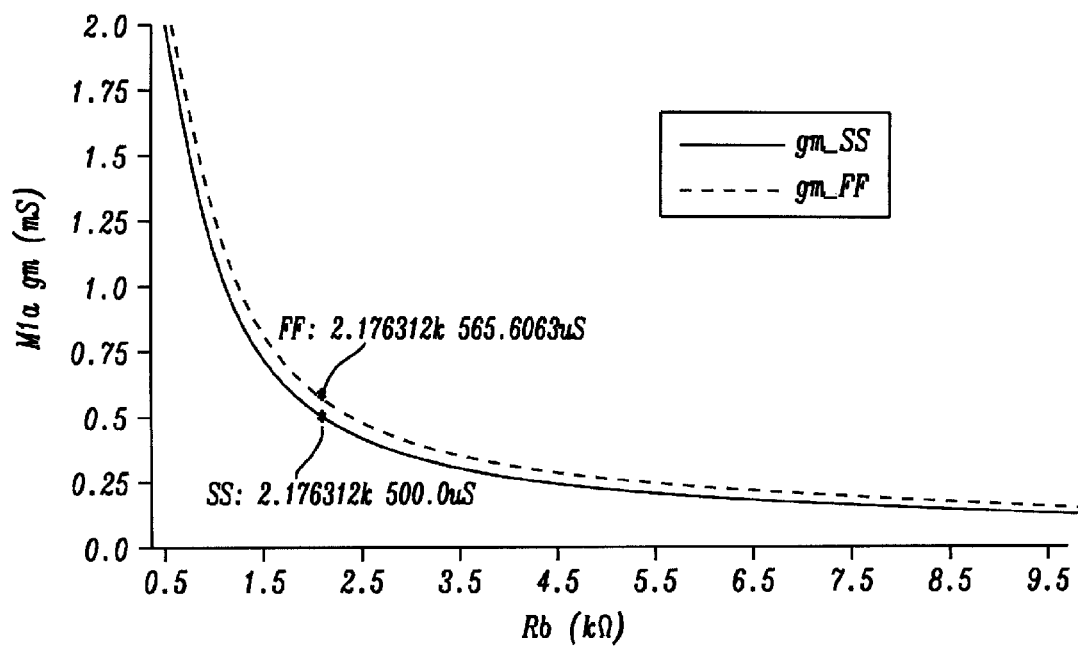


FIG. 4

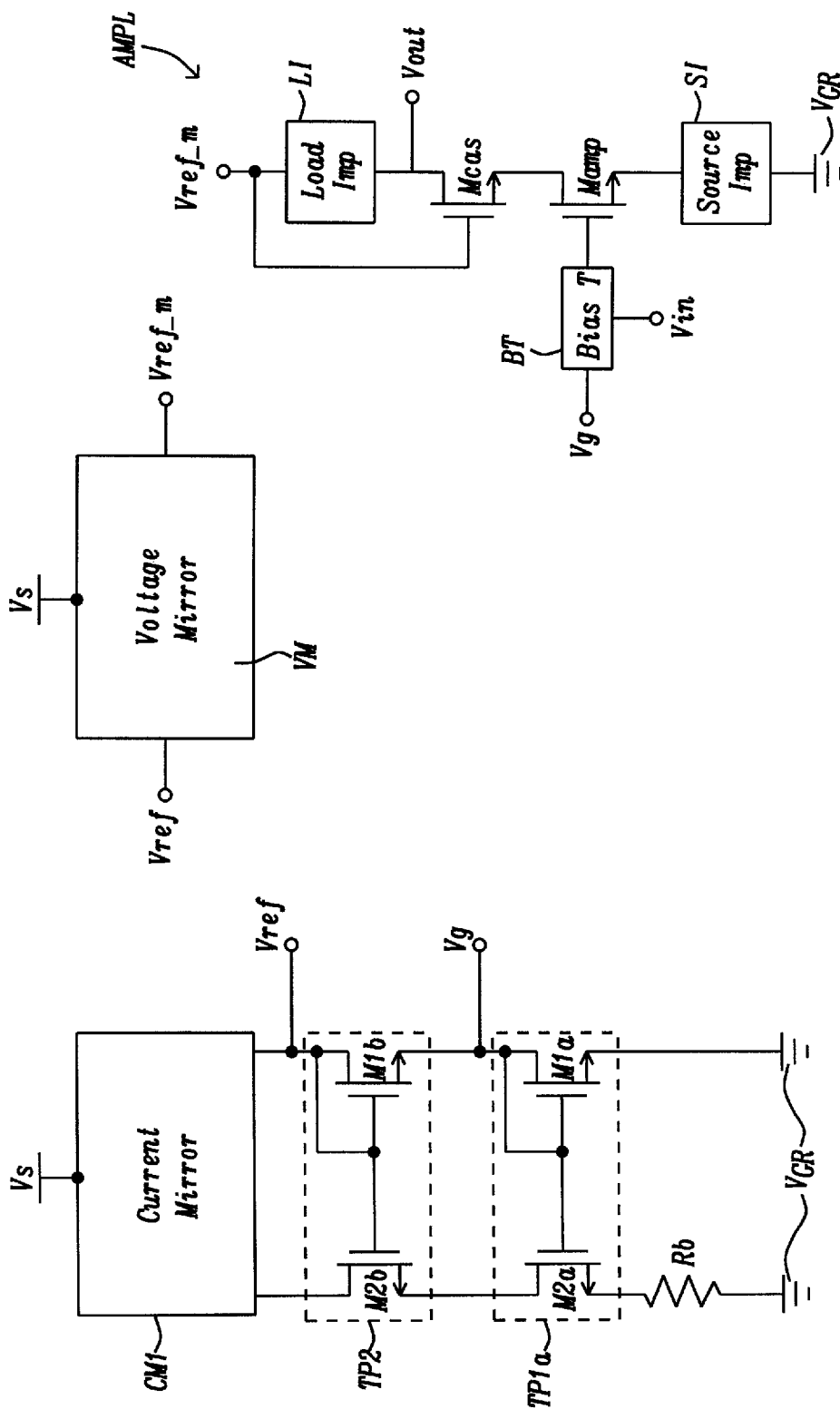


FIG. 5

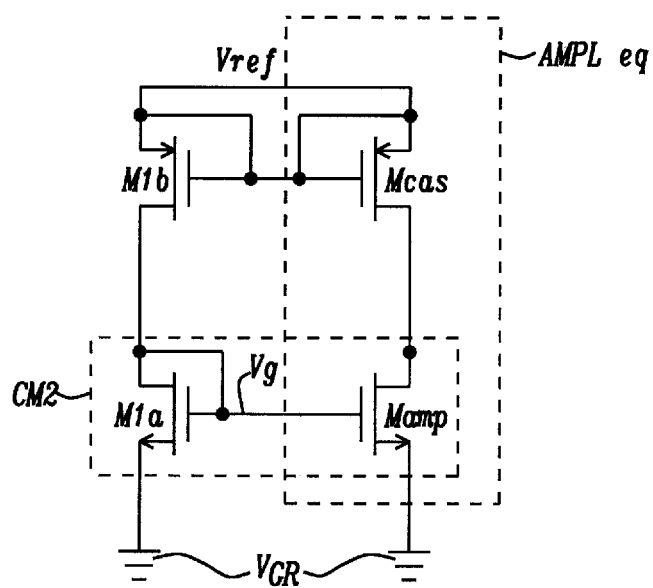
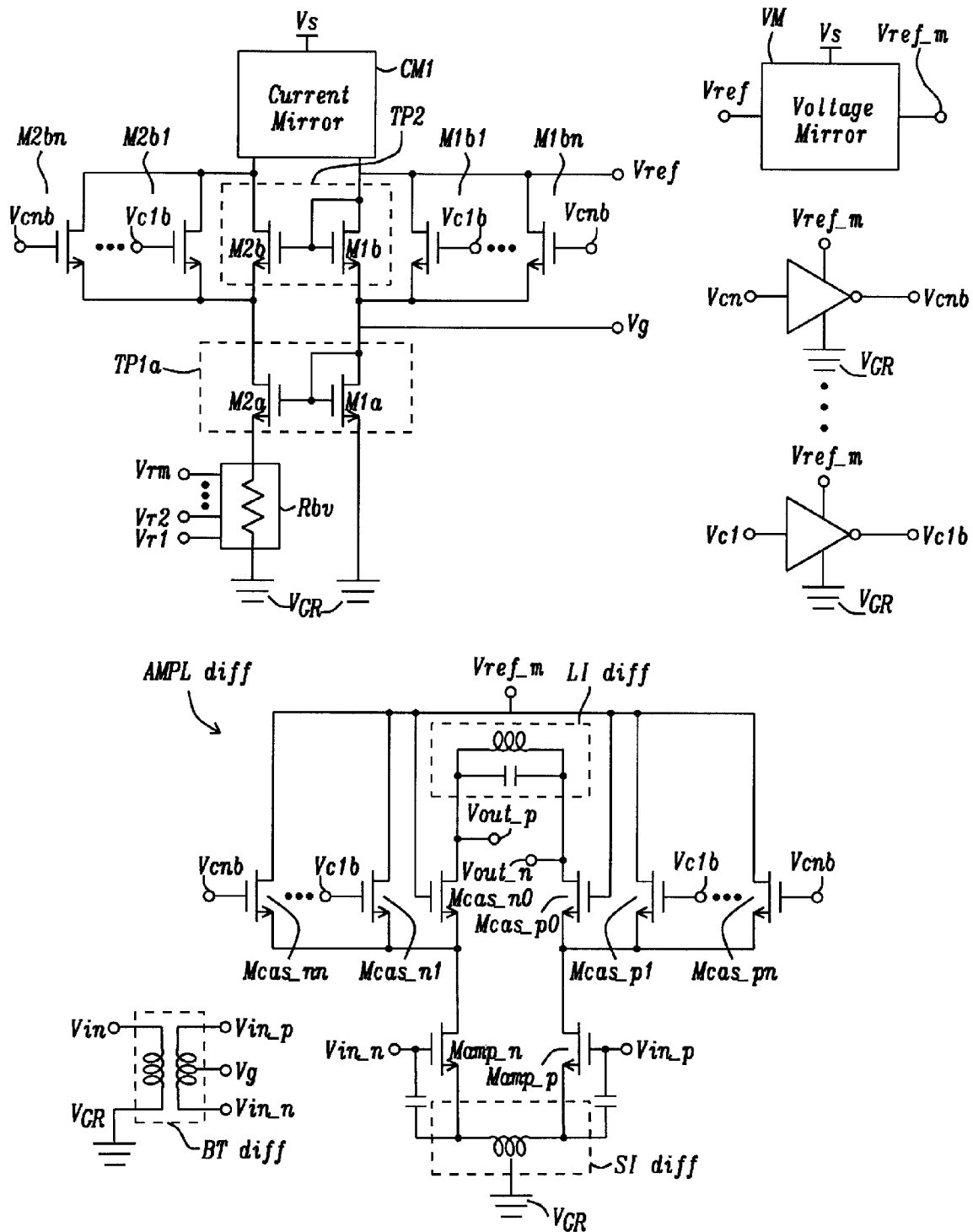


FIG. 6



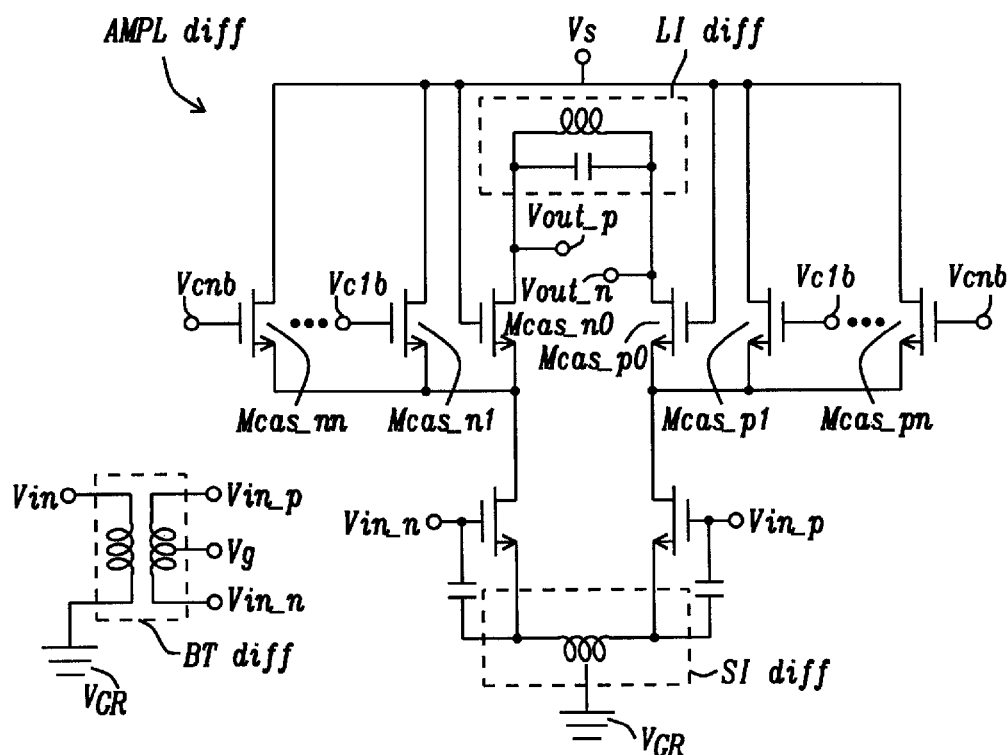
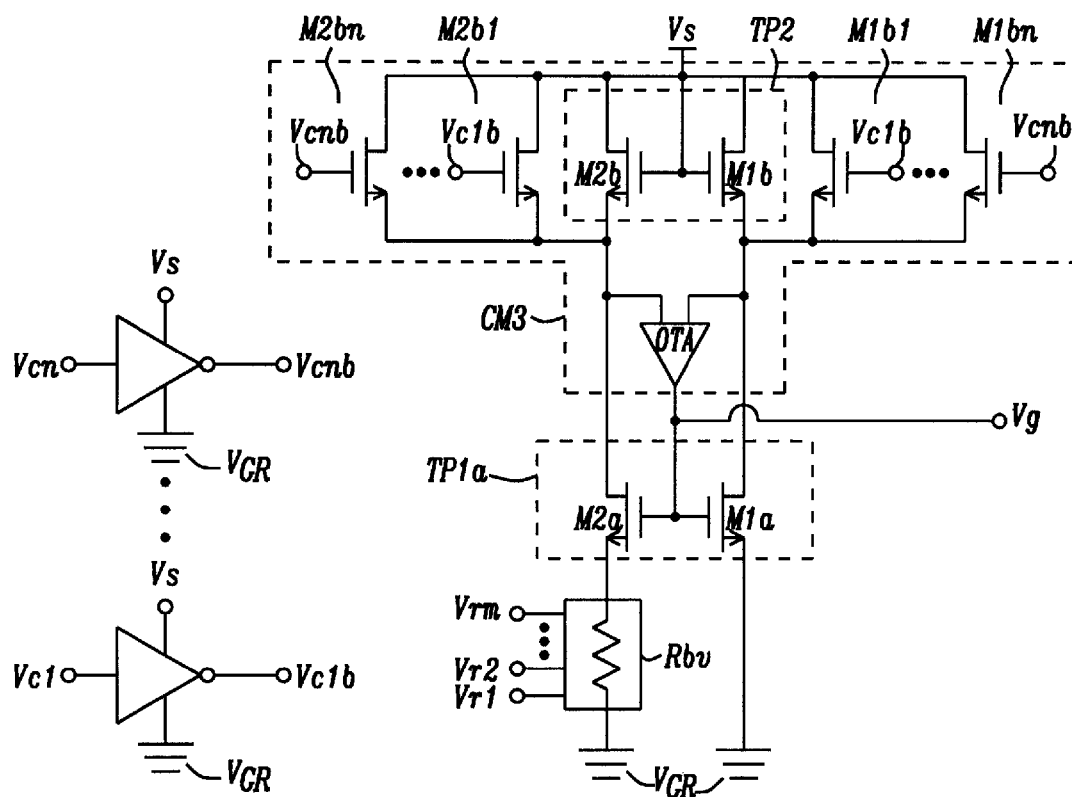


FIG. 8

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ELECTRONIC BIASING CIRCUIT FOR CONSTANT TRANSCONDUCTANCE

TECHNICAL FIELD

The present invention relates to an electronic circuit with biasing topology for constant transconductance.

BACKGROUND ART

The performance of amplifiers is heavily affected by variations in Process, Voltage, and Temperature (PVT). In CMOS technologies, the so-called constant-gm circuit [1] (gm=transconductance), illustrated in FIG. 1, is traditionally employed to partly compensate those variations. FIG. 1 shows an electronic biasing circuit with a current mirror CM1, a transistor pair TP1 and a resistor element Rb. The current mirror CM1 and transistor pair TP1 in FIG. 1 are implemented with MOSFETs.

The current mirror CM1 comprises two PMOS transistors M3, M4 connected in a well known current mirror arrangement, such that a current I1 flowing from a source to a drain of transistor M3 is substantially equal to a current I2 flowing from a source to a drain of transistor M4. Here, it is observed that the term “substantially” means “as close as possible to” within the error introduced by the finite output resistance of the MOSFETs, and within any possible manufacturing tolerances. This applies throughout the entire specification.

The gate of transistor M3 is connected to its drain. So, transistor M3 is diode connected. The sources of transistors M3, M4 are connected together to a power supply voltage V_S .

The transistor pair TP1 comprises two NMOS transistors M1, M2. The gate of transistor M1 is connected to its drain. So, transistor M1 is diode connected. The gate and drain of transistor M1 are connected to the drain of transistor M4 of current mirror CM1. The source of transistor M1 is connected to ground voltage V_{GR} , or, worded more generally, a supply reference voltage. The current through transistor M1 is indicated by I2'.

The gate of transistor M2 is connected to the gate of transistor M1. The source of transistor M2 is connected to one side of a resistor element Rb whereas the other side of the resistor element Rb is connected to ground voltage V_{GR} . The drain of transistor M2 is connected to the drain of transistor M3. The current through transistor M2 is indicated by I1'.

Ideally, in the circuit of FIG. 1, because of the presence of current mirror CM1, the following relation should apply:

$$I1 = I2 = I1' = I2'$$

Transistors M1, M2, and resistor element Rb define the currents I1, I2, I1', I2' of this circuit in the non-trivial (non-zero) solution (a startup circuit—not shown in FIG. 1—is typically forcing the non-trivial solution to prevail). First order analysis with the well-known quadratic MOSFET model [1] shows that the transconductance of the MOSFETs is inversely proportional to the resistance Rb. The circuit generates a bias voltage V_g at the common node between the drain of transistor M4 and the drain/gate of transistor M1. This output voltage V_g is, for instance, used to bias gate terminals of MOSFETs in amplifiers, or other electronic circuits that need constant transconductance across PVT variations.

Some disadvantages of the circuit shown in FIG. 1 are:

1. The complex behavior of MOSFETs renders this circuit incapable of tracking the PVT variations in actual applications. Even transistor M1 (in FIG. 1) does not exhibit a constant transconductance across PVT variations.

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2. The generation of only the bias voltage V_g is not enough to mirror the biasing conditions to other MOSFETs in other circuits connected to bias voltage V_g , potentially leading to significant errors in the definition of the current of the other circuit to be biased by the constant-gm circuit. The uncertainty in the definition of the transconductance is even higher.

SUMMARY

It is an object to solve one or more of the above mentioned problems. In a first aspect, the object of the invention is to provide an electronic biasing circuit in which the transconductances of the biasing circuit MOSFETs are practically constant against PVT variations, even in deep submicron CMOS technologies, where the behavior of MOSFETs deviates drastically from the quadratic model. Such a biasing circuit is claimed in independent claim 1.

By doing so, MOSFETs are allowed to be biased in weak inversion in order to maximize the transconductance efficiency (=transconductance/bias_current), while still providing PVT robustness, despite the very low output resistance of weakly inverted MOSFETs at minimum length channels (due to intensified Drain Induced Barrier Lowering—DIBL).

The claims that depend on claim 1 are focusing on advantageous embodiments. In one such embodiment, the resistor element is a variable resistor element (Rbv). This allows gain switching in a ratiometric way, which is accurate across PVT variations.

In a second aspect, it is an object to provide an electronic circuit with a biasing circuit and a circuit to be biased by the biasing circuit, in which the biasing conditions from the biasing circuit are accurately mirrored to the circuit to be biased, typically an amplifier, which leads to both current and transconductance accurate mirroring, even in deep submicron CMOS technologies. To that effect, the present invention claims such an electronic circuit in claim 9. Advantageous embodiments of such electronic circuits are claimed in dependent claims 10-17.

In an embodiment, as claimed in claims 10 and 11, a reference supply voltage for, e.g., a Low Drop Out regulator that powers an amplifier is also generated by the biasing circuit, leading to improved on chip isolation between circuit blocks in integrated circuits, and less parasitic coupling by eliminating the need to route long wires to a separate PVT compensated and precise voltage reference.

Embodiments claimed in claims 15 and 16 allow multi-level cascode gain switching, which is accurate across PVT variations. In combination with the above mentioned variable resistor element, if applied, this results in optimizing the tradeoff between amplifier performance and current consumption, by combining the benefits of cascode gain switching and resistor based gain switching in the biasing circuit.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The invention will be explained in detail with reference to some drawings that are only intended to show embodiments of the invention and not to limit the scope. The scope of the invention is defined in the annexed claims and by its technical equivalents. I.e., a person skilled in the art will understand that features, components, elements, etc. explicitly used to explain the invention can be substituted by technical equivalents unless otherwise stated. The drawings show:

FIG. 1 shows a traditional circuit for generating constant transconductance biasing conditions.

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FIG. 2 shows a circuit for generating constant transconductance biasing conditions according to the present invention.

FIG. 3 shows a curve of transconductance vs bias resistor Rb for a traditional constant-gm circuit, for a slow and a fast process corner. A slow (fast) process corner is mainly characterized by a higher (lower) than normal oxide thickness, higher (lower) than normal threshold voltage, and lower (higher) than normal carrier mobility.

FIG. 4 shows a curve of transconductance vs bias resistor Rb for a constant-gm circuit according to the invention, for a slow and a fast process.

FIG. 5 shows a schematic diagram of a proposed biasing topology.

FIG. 6 shows an equivalent circuit of FIG. 5 at DC, with respect to the biasing view.

FIG. 7 shows cascode gain switching replication at the biasing circuit.

FIG. 8 shows an alternative embodiment to the circuit of FIG. 7.

DESCRIPTION OF A PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

In the explanation below, like reference numbers/signs in different drawings are used to refer to the same components/elements.

FIG. 2 shows an embodiment of a biasing circuit in accordance with the present invention. Current mirror CM1 is the same as in FIG. 1. A first transistor pair TP1a has two transistors M1a, M2a, arranged in the same way as transistors M1, M2 in FIG. 1.

The difference with FIG. 1 is the inclusion of a second transistor pair TP2 which comprises an NMOS transistor M1b and an NMOS transistor M2b. Transistor M1b has its gate connected to its drain which is also connected to the drain of transistor M4. The transistor M1b has a source connected to the drain of transistor M1a. Transistor M2b has a drain connected to the drain of transistor M3. The transistor M2b has a source connected to the drain of transistor M2a.

Like in the prior art arrangement of FIG. 1, the gate/drain of transistor M1a, which is now connected to the source of transistor M1b, provides bias voltage Vg. However, the drain of transistor M4, which is now connected to the drain of transistor M1b, may now provide a reference voltage Vref, as will be explained later in more detail.

By including the transistors M1b and M2b which are of the same MOSFET type (i.e., both are NMOS transistors) in the constant-gm biasing circuit, as shown in FIG. 2, the transconductances of the biasing circuit MOSFETs are more constant against PVT variations. Those transistors M1b and M2b make sure that the voltages at the drains of transistors M1a and M2a remain closer to each other, leading to a better-controlled definition of transconductance. In the example of FIG. 2, transistors M3 and M4 should have equal sizes, whereas transistors M2a and M2b have higher W/L ratios than transistors M1a and M1b, e.g. typically 4 times higher.

It is important to note that, if two PMOS transistors were added in a complementary way just after the PMOS transistors M3 and M4 instead, there would be no benefit, as the result would just be a cascode PMOS mirror, being able to sustain a very high voltage difference at its outputs while mirroring accurately the current between its branches, which is not the desired environment for transistors M1a and M2a. But, the whole setup can be inverted as long as all transistors M1a, M1b, M2a, M2b are of the same MOSFET type, i.e., are either NMOS or PMOS transistors, and transistors M3, M4 are of the opposite MOSFET type.

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As an example of the improvement this proposal brings, a comparison in the transconductance dependence on MOSFET process corner (slow/fast) is made for the traditional constant-gm circuit (FIG. 3) and the proposed one (FIG. 4). FIG. 3 and FIG. 4, respectively, show the transconductance of transistor M1 and M1a, respectively, in mS as a function of the resistance of resistor element Rb (in kΩ). The solid line shows the relationship for a slow process corner (i.e., higher than normal oxide thickness, higher than normal threshold voltage, and lower than normal carrier mobility), whereas the dotted line shows the relationship for a fast process corner (i.e., lower than normal oxide thickness, lower than normal threshold voltage, and higher than normal carrier mobility).

FIG. 3 shows that, for a minimum desired M1 transconductance of 0.5 mS, in the case of the traditional biasing circuit of FIG. 1, the error in the transconductance value due to process variations is around 0.2 mS (0.5 mS at the slow process corner and 0.7 mS at the fast one). In the case of the proposed biasing circuit of FIG. 2, the relevant error for a minimum desired M1a transconductance of 0.5 mS is now only 0.066 mS, as shown in FIG. 4, that is, 3 times smaller than the traditional error.

The ultimate goal of designing a biasing circuit is, however, to define the transconductance of an actual circuit to be biased and connected to bias voltage Vg, e.g. an amplifier, and not only the transconductance of the biasing circuit itself. In order to achieve this, accurate mirroring of the core of the circuit to be biased and the biasing circuit environments is required. The traditional biasing circuit fails to do so. On the other hand, the biasing circuit shown in FIG. 2 lends itself to replicating the environment of nowadays, most popular amplifier topology, namely, the cascode topology. FIG. 5 shows the schematic diagram of the proposed biasing topology. Nodes with the same name such as Vg, Vref, and Vref_m in different parts of the circuit shown are connected (connecting wires not shown for clarity reasons). The left part of FIG. 5 shows the biasing circuit of FIG. 2. The middle part of FIG. 5 shows a voltage mirror VM, whereas the right part shows a schematic diagram of a cascode amplifier AMPL.

The voltage mirror VM is an electronic circuit arranged to copy an input voltage to an output voltage, i.e. the reference voltage Vref to a mirrored reference Vref_m, without loading the Vref node, so without loading the gate/drain of transistor M1b in the biasing circuit. Voltage Vref_m is the power supply voltage to amplifier AMPL. Implementations of the voltage mirror VM include, but are not limited to, Low Drop Out regulators. In general, linear or switching feedback voltage regulators can serve as a voltage mirror.

The use of a Low Drop Out regulator per block in integrated circuits has become quite popular, since it allows more efficient power control of complex integrated systems, more isolation between blocks, and lower pin count. This topology reuses the Low Drop Out regulator to achieve, among others, the stability in the transconductance across PVT variations. In typical prior art cases, the Low Drop Out regulator is connected to a reference voltage Vref, that is generated by a precise and PVT compensated circuit, via typically long on chip conductor lines that can cross ground domains and pick up noisy signals. Using the proposed biasing topology, the reference voltage Vref is generated by the biasing circuit itself, and, thus, the need for long conductor lines is eliminated, and the complete system can reside in one ground domain, leading to less noise coupling.

The amplifier AMPL in the right part of FIG. 5 comprises a cascode core, i.e. at least one MOS transistor Mcas, connected in series with a main amplifying MOSFET Mamp. Note that if more than one cascode transistors are used, they

have to be replicated in the biasing circuit as well. The transistor Mcas has a drain connected to one side of a load impedance (Load Imp) LI, which drain also provides an output voltage Vout. The transistor Mcas has a gate connected to the other side of the load impedance LI. Transistor Mcas has a source connected to a drain of an amplifying transistor Mamp. This transistor Mamp is the main amplifying MOSFET of the amplifier AMPL. A source impedance (Source Imp) SI is connected between a source of transistor Mamp and ground V_{GR} .

Transistor Mamp has a gate connected to an output of an input circuit BT. The input circuit BT is a Bias Tee which receives bias voltage V_g of the biasing circuit. Input circuit BT has an input terminal arranged to receive an AC input voltage V_{in} which is to be amplified by the amplifier to render amplified output voltage Vout. The aforementioned load impedance LI and source impedance SI are both arranged to provide a near 0 ohms impedance at DC level. If for any reason their impedance at DC level has to be different, they should also be replicated at the biasing circuit. The input circuit BT can be any electronic circuit that allows DC bias voltage V_g to be connected to the gate of transistor Mamp in a DC sense, and allows the input voltage V_{in} to be connected to the gate of transistor Mamp in an AC sense. What is more, the amplifier AMPL can be either single-ended, i.e. having one output terminal to provide output signal Vout, as shown in FIG. 5, or differential, as shown in FIGS. 7 and 8. It can be generalized to every circuit that incorporates a cascode transconductor.

At DC or almost DC (very low frequencies) not only the load impedance LI and source impedance SI are substantially equal to 0 ohm, but that also applies to the DC path of the input circuit BT (from V_g to the gate of Mamp). What is more, the voltage mirror VM makes sure that the voltages at the gates of transistor M1b and transistor Mcas are substantially equal. Therefore, then, the circuit of the amplifier AMPL, with respect to the biasing view, becomes substantially identical to an equivalent circuit AMPL_{eq} comprising the two transistors Mcas and Mamp in series as shown in FIG. 6, in which transistor Mcas has its gate short circuited to its drain.

As shown, the amplifier AMPL becomes substantially identical to the series connection of transistors M1a, M1b of the biasing circuit. The only difference is that the amplifying transistor Mamp of the amplifier AMPL is not diode connected. So, the system of the four NMOS transistors M1a, M1b, Mamp, Mcas can be seen as a second current mirror CM2, consisting of transistor M1a and amplifying transistor Mamp, with diode connected transistor M1b as a load for transistor M1a and identically diode connected transistor Mcas as a load for amplifying transistor Mamp. That is, perfect mirroring of the currents and all voltages between the series connection of transistors M1a, M1b and the series connection of transistors Mcas and Mamp is achieved and, thus, perfect transconductance mirroring as well.

It is apparent that the "matching" transistors, i.e. transistor M1a with transistor Mamp and transistor M1b with transistor Mcas, don't have to be the same size, i.e., the ratio of the sizes is what counts. For example, if transistor Mamp has a total W_{amp}/L_{amp} ratio (taking into account fingering, multiplicity and in general all ways of sizing a MOSFET) that is twice the ratio W_{1a}/L_{1a} of transistor M1a, then ratio W_{cas}/L_{cas} of transistor Mcas should also be twice the ratio W_{1b}/L_{1b} of transistor M1b. What is more, the whole topology (bias circuit and amplifier) can be generated in complementary form, in case PMOS devices need to be used in the amplifier.

Gain Programmability

As explained above, the transconductances of the MOSFET transistors in the proposed biasing circuit are PVT robust and the amplifier environment is almost precisely replicated in the biasing circuit. I.e., in the above example the series connection of transistor Mcas and Mamp in the amplifier AMPL is, in the equivalent circuit for DC level, almost identically present at the output side of the biasing circuit by means of the series connection of transistors M1a and M1b. These facts together make sure that the transconductance of the amplifier is really inversely proportionally ($1/x$) related to the bias resistor value R_b , even in deep submicron technologies. That is, if we double the resistor value R_b , then the transconductance, and, thus, the voltage gain of the amplifier AMPL, will halve, i.e. accurately drop by 6 dB.

So, by incorporating a suitable resistor network, we can achieve gain programmability in a very simple and efficient way. I.e., one just has to switch DC bias resistors, not high frequency signals, where the gain difference (in dB) can be very well controlled as it depends on resistor ratios which can be very well controlled in IC processes. Accurate gain difference is required in receivers with automatic gain control, because, otherwise, the received signal strength indication (RSSI) function of the receiver is not linear with respect to the input signal level.

Gain programmability can be typically achieved by cascode gain switching, where extra cascode MOSFET transistors are connected in the amplifier AMPL as shown in FIG. 7.

In the lower part of FIG. 7 a differential amplifier AMPL_{diff} is shown. The differential amplifier AMPL_{diff} comprises a cascode transistor Mcas_{n0}. The transistor Mcas_{n0} has a drain connected to one side of a load impedance LI_{diff}, which drain also provides a positive part Vout_p of an output voltage Vout. The transistor Mcas_{n0} has a gate connected to power supply voltage Vref_m. Transistor Mcas_{n0} has a source connected to a drain of an amplifying transistor Mamp_n. This transistor Mamp_n is one of two main amplifying MOSFETs of the differential amplifier AMPL_{diff}. A source impedance SI_{diff} is connected between a source of transistor Mamp_n and ground V_{GR} .

Transistor Mamp_n has a gate connected to an output voltage Vin_n of an input circuit BT_{diff}. The gate of transistor Mamp_n can be connected to its source via a capacitor.

The load impedance LI_{diff} comprises a parallel circuit of a capacitor and a coil of which one side is connected to the drain of transistor Mcas_{n0}. The coil has an intermediate branch connected to power supply voltage Vref_m.

The source impedance SI_{diff} is a coil having one side connected to the gate of transistors Mamp_n and an intermediate branch connected to ground V_{GR} . The differential amplifier AMPL_{diff} also comprises a cascade transistor Mcas_{p0}. The transistor Mcas_{p0} has a drain connected to another side of load impedance LI_{diff}, which drain also provides a negative part Vout_n of an output voltage Vout. The intermediate branch of the coil of load impedance LI_{diff} is arranged such that the same impedance is available between supply voltage terminal Vref_m and the drain of transistor Mcas_{n0} and between supply voltage terminal Vref_m and the drain of transistor Mcas_{p0}.

The output voltage Vout is a differential output voltage defined by $V_{out_p} + V_{out_n}$. The transistor Mcas_{p0} has a gate connected to power supply voltage Vref_m. Transistor Mcas_{p0} has a source connected to a drain of an amplifying transistor Mamp_p. This transistor Mamp_p is another one of two main amplifying MOSFETs of the differential amplifier AMPL_{diff}. The source of transistor Mamp_p is connected to the other side of source impedance SI_{diff}.

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The intermediate branch of the coil of source impedance SI_{diff} is arranged such that the same impedance is available between ground V_{GR} and the source of transistor M_{amp_n} and between ground V_{GR} and the source of transistor M_{amp_p} . Transistor M_{amp_p} has a gate connected to an output voltage V_{in_p} of input circuit BT_{diff} . The gate of transistor M_{amp_p} can be connected to its source via a capacitor, preferably identical to the one connected to M_{amp_n} .

In the circuit of FIG. 7 the input signal is a differential voltage $V_{in}=V_{in_p}-V_{in_n}$. This differential signal $V_{in_p}-V_{in_n}$ is produced by an input circuit BT_{diff} . The input circuit BT_{diff} comprises a transformer having a first coil connected between input voltage V_{in} and ground V_{GR} , and a second coil of which one terminal provides output voltage V_{out_p} and another terminal provides output voltage V_{out_n} . Between these two terminals, the second coil is connected to supply bias voltage V_g as produced by the biasing circuit.

A plurality of n cascode transistors $M_{cas_n1}, \dots, M_{cas_nn}$ is arranged in parallel to each other. I.e., all sources of transistors $M_{cas_n1}, \dots, M_{cas_nn}$ are connected together and connected to the source of transistor M_{cas_n0} . Moreover, all drains of transistors $M_{cas_n1}, \dots, M_{cas_nn}$ are connected together and connected to supply voltage V_{ref_m} . Gates of these transistors $M_{cas_n1}, \dots, M_{cas_nn}$ receive respective control voltages V_{c1b}, \dots, V_{cnb} . As shown, in the embodiment of FIG. 7, these control voltages V_{c1b}, \dots, V_{cnb} are derived from basic control voltages V_{c1}, \dots, V_{cn} buffered by at least one digital gate which receives a power supply substantially equal to the DC voltage V_{ref_m} .

Similarly, a plurality of n cascode transistors $M_{cas_p1}, \dots, M_{cas_pn}$ is arranged in parallel to each other. I.e., all sources of transistors $M_{cas_p1}, \dots, M_{cas_pn}$ are connected together and connected to the source of transistor M_{cas_p0} . Moreover, all drains of transistors $M_{cas_p1}, \dots, M_{cas_pn}$ are connected together and connected to supply voltage V_{ref_m} . Gates of these transistors $M_{cas_p1}, \dots, M_{cas_pn}$ receive respective control voltages V_{c1b}, \dots, V_{cnb} , i.e. the same control voltages as applied to the gates of transistors $M_{cas_n1}, \dots, M_{cas_nn}$, respectively.

The control voltages V_{c1b}, \dots, V_{cnb} may be generated from a set of original control voltages V_{c1}, \dots, V_{cn} . I.e., the control signals V_{c1b}, \dots, V_{cnb} , applied at the gates of the switched cascode transistors may be buffered by inverters/chains of inverters, out of which the last inverter is powered by the V_{ref_m} supply of the voltage mirror. This guarantees precise replication of the voltages during all possible modes.

In order to mirror the circuit of FIG. 7, i.e. actually its DC equivalent circuit, in the biasing circuit, FIG. 7 shows the following features:

A same plurality of n biasing cascode transistors M_{2b1}, \dots, M_{2bn} is arranged in parallel to transistor M_{2b} . I.e., all sources of biasing cascode transistors M_{2b1}, \dots, M_{2bn} are connected together and connected to the source of transistor M_{2b} . Moreover, all drains of transistors M_{2b1}, \dots, M_{2bn} are connected together and connected to the gate of transistor M_{2b} . All these drains are also connected to the drain of transistor M_{2b} . However, note that, if impedance LI_{diff} in the circuit to be biased $AMPL_{diff}$ has a DC resistance not close to 0 Ohm, a resistance could be applied between the drains of transistors M_{2b1}, \dots, M_{2bn} and the drain of transistor M_{2b} with an equivalent value to the one of impedance LI_{diff} . In this case, the drains of transistors M_{2b1}, \dots, M_{2bn} would be connected to the gate of transistor M_{2b} .

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A same plurality of n biasing cascode transistors M_{1b1}, \dots, M_{1bn} is arranged in parallel to transistor M_{1b} . I.e., all sources of biasing cascode transistors M_{1b1}, \dots, M_{1bn} are connected together and connected to the source of transistor M_{1b} . Moreover, all drains of transistors M_{1b1}, \dots, M_{1bn} are connected together and connected to the gate of transistor M_{1b} . All these drains are also connected to the drain of transistor M_{1b} . However, note that, if impedance LI_{diff} in the circuit to be biased $AMPL_{diff}$ has a DC resistance not close to 0 Ohm, a resistance could be applied between the drains of transistors M_{1b1}, \dots, M_{1bn} and the drain of transistor M_{1b} with an equivalent value to the one of impedance LI_{diff} . In this case, the drains of transistors M_{1b1}, \dots, M_{1bn} would still be connected to the gate of transistor M_{1b} .

Gates of respective biasing cascode transistors M_{2b1}, \dots, M_{2bn} receive the abovementioned respective control voltages V_{c1b}, \dots, V_{cnb} .

Gates of respective biasing cascode transistors M_{1b1}, \dots, M_{1bn} also receive the abovementioned respective control voltages V_{c1b}, \dots, V_{cnb} .

Moreover, resistor element R_b has been substituted by a variable resistor element R_{bv} . Variable resistor element is arranged to provide a variable resistance value between the source of transistor M_{2a} and ground V_{GR} . This variable resistor element can be implemented in known way. It may advantageously be controllable by a plurality of different control voltages V_{r1}, \dots, V_{rm} , such that the variable resistance value can be controlled to be one of a plurality of discrete different values.

When the cascode is not activated, i.e. when all of the control voltages V_{c1b}, \dots, V_{cnb} are such that neither one of the transistors receiving these control voltages V_{c1b}, \dots, V_{cnb} at their respective gates is active the amplifier $AMPL_{diff}$ operates normally, i.e. in the high gain mode. When e.g. cascode transistor M_{cas_n1} is activated, depending on its size, it steals a proportional amount of AC current from transistor M_{cas_n0} and steers this stolen current directly to the supply voltage V_{ref_m} , instead of through the load impedance LI_{diff} . For example, supposing that M_{cas_n1} and M_{cas_n2} are the activated switched cascode transistors at the left side of $AMPL_{diff}$, and M_{cas_p1} and M_{cas_p2} are the activated switched cascode transistors at the right side of $AMPL_{diff}$, then, if the total combined size of those activated switched cascode transistors per side of $AMPL_{diff}$, respectively, i.e. the combined size of transistors M_{cas_n1} and M_{cas_n2} for the left side and the combined size of transistors M_{cas_p1} and M_{cas_p2} for the right side, respectively, is equal to the sizes of the basic cascode transistors M_{cas_n0} and M_{cas_p0} , respectively, then half of the AC current does not flow through the load impedance LI_{diff} , and thus the gain is 6 dB lower. Different gain steps are also possible, depending on the total size of the activated switched cascode transistors $M_{cas_n1}, \dots, M_{cas_nn}, M_{cas_p1}, \dots, M_{cas_pn}$. Since (digital) control voltages V_{c1}, \dots, V_{cn} control the switching of the cascode $M_{cas_n1}, \dots, M_{cas_nn}, M_{cas_p1}, \dots, M_{cas_pn}$, they control the gain as obtained by the amplifier $AMPL$. The benefit of this mechanism of gain switching is that it does not affect the biasing of the amplifier $AMPL_{diff}$, and, thus, the input related Figures of merit of the amplifier $AMPL_{diff}$, like input impedance and the noise Figure. The downside is of course the fact that no current is saved while lowering the gain.

If gain programmability needs to be supported by means of cascode gain switching, then the switched cascode structure is preferably also replicated at the biasing circuit, so that the

cascode gain switching is also accurate across PVT variations. FIG. 7, as explained above, depicts the replication of the switched cascode transistors $M_{cas_n1}, \dots, M_{cas_nn}, M_{cas_p1}, \dots, M_{cas_pn}$ in the biasing circuit.

In an embodiment, the sizes of the biasing MOSFETs M_{2a}, M_{2b} , respectively, are 4 times the sizes of the biasing MOSFETs M_{1a}, M_{1b} , respectively. The sizes of the biasing cascode transistors M_{2b1}, \dots, M_{2bn} , respectively, are 4 times the sizes of the biasing cascode transistors M_{1b1}, \dots, M_{1bn} , respectively. The size ratio between the biasing transistor M_{1a} and the amplifier transistor M_{amp_n} , is the same as the size ratio between the biasing transistor M_{1a} and the amplifier transistor M_{amp_p} , and the same as the size ratio between the biasing transistor M_{1b} and the amplifier transistor M_{cas_p0} , and the same as the size ratios between the biasing transistors M_{1b1}, \dots, M_{1bn} , respectively, and the switched cascode transistors $M_{cas_n1}, \dots, M_{cas_nn}$, respectively, and the same as the size ratios between the biasing transistors M_{1b1}, \dots, M_{1bn} , respectively, and the switched cascode transistors $M_{cas_p1}, \dots, M_{cas_pn}$, respectively. Then, the size ratio between the biasing cascode transistors M_{2b1}, \dots, M_{2bn} , respectively, and transistor M_{2b} , the size ratio between the biasing cascode transistors M_{1b1}, \dots, M_{1bn} , respectively, and transistor M_{1b} , the size ratio between the cascode transistors $M_{cas_n1}, \dots, M_{cas_nn}$, respectively, and cascode transistor M_{cas_n0} , and the size ratio between the cascode transistors $M_{cas_p1}, \dots, M_{cas_pn}$, respectively, and cascode transistor M_{cas_p0} are also all the same. One could, alternatively, also replicate the switched cascode structure only on the right branch of the biasing circuit of FIG. 7, so leaving out biasing cascode transistors M_{2b1}, \dots, M_{2bn} , but with reduction in accuracy.

The amplifier AMPLdiff used in FIG. 7 is a differential, low noise, cascode, tuned amplifier. Of course, the same principle would apply to a single ended amplifier AMPL as shown in FIG. 5.

The two abovementioned gain mechanisms, i.e. gain switching by means of the switched cascode structure and by means of the variable resistor element Rbv can be implemented independently. However, they can, alternatively, be combined. If we combine the two gain switching mechanisms, we can gain more flexibility in optimizing the system. For example, we could combine the two mechanisms just to get more range of programmable gain. We could even combine them for just one, even small, gain step, in order to find the optimum point between current consumption savings (by Rbv programmability) and keeping the input related Figures of merit of the amplifier AMPL or AMPLdiff unaffected (by cascode gain switching). For example, if a gain step of 12 dB is required, then e.g. 6 dB could be allocated to Rbv programmability, rendering the current consumption even less than half—due to the weaker inversion, and thus, higher transconductance efficiency—in the low gain mode, and the rest 6 dB could be addressed by the cascode gain switching. Different allocations are possible depending on the system optimization. Simple digital look up tables could abstract the allocation of gain steps in the two mechanisms in a small set of user-friendly predefined gain settings.

Alternative Embodiment

FIG. 8 illustrates an alternative implementation of FIG. 7. The differential amplifier AMPLdiff is identical to the one in FIG. 7 and is indicated with the same reference signs.

The difference is that the voltage mirror VM is not applied. In this case, the replication of the supply voltage of the ampli-

fier AMPLdiff, which was V_{ref_m} in FIG. 7 but is now voltage V_{SS} , is achieved by removing the PMOS current mirror CM1 completely from the biasing circuit and connecting the drains of cascode transistors $M_{2b1}, \dots, M_{2bn}, M_{1b1}, \dots, M_{1bn}$, as well as the drains of transistors M_{2b} and M_{1b} of the biasing circuit directly to the supply voltage V_{SS} , as is the case for the amplifier AMPLdiff itself.

Moreover, since we do not have voltage V_{ref_m} , as shown, in the embodiment of FIG. 8, the control voltages V_{c1b}, \dots, V_{cnb} are derived from basic control voltages V_{c1}, \dots, V_{cn} buffered by at least one digital gate which receives supply voltage V_{SS} .

Preferably, the sizes of the biasing cascode transistors $M_{2b}, M_{2b1}, \dots, M_{2bn}$, respectively, are equal to the sizes of the biasing cascode transistors $M_{1b}, M_{1b1}, \dots, M_{1bn}$, respectively. The size of the biasing MOSFET M_{2a} is preferably 4 times the size of the biasing MOSFET M_{1a} . The size ratio between the biasing transistor M_{1a} and the amplifier transistor M_{amp_n} , is the same as the size ratio between the biasing transistor M_{1a} and the amplifier transistor M_{amp_p} , and the same as the size ratio between the biasing transistor M_{1b} and the amplifier transistor M_{cas_p0} , and the same as the size ratios between the biasing transistors M_{1b1}, \dots, M_{1bn} , respectively, and the switched cascode transistors $M_{cas_n1}, \dots, M_{cas_nn}$, respectively, and the same as the size ratios between the biasing transistors M_{1b1}, \dots, M_{1bn} , respectively, and the switched cascode transistors $M_{cas_p1}, \dots, M_{cas_pn}$, respectively.

An operational transconductance amplifier OTA is shown in the middle of the biasing circuit. The OTA has two input terminals. A first input terminal is connected to the drain of transistor M_{1a} , whereas a second terminal is connected to the drain of transistor M_{2a} . The OTA has one output terminal which is connected to the interconnected gates of transistors M_{1a}, M_{2a} . Note that the output terminal of the OTA now provides bias voltage V_g .

The switched cascode transistors $M_{2b1}, \dots, M_{2bn}, M_{1b1}, \dots, M_{1bn}$, and cascode transistors M_{2b}, M_{1b} of the biasing circuit, together with the OTA operate together as a required current mirror CM3. Indeed, the equality of the combined cascode device sizes in the left and right branches of the biasing circuit, in conjunction with the equality of the voltages across all the nodes, results in equal currents in the left and right branches of the biasing circuit. What is more, the OTA makes sure that, not only the currents, but also the voltages at the drains of M_{1a} and M_{2a} are equal, leading to excellent transconductance definition, and, thus, robustness against PVT variations.

This implementation also lends itself to supporting both gain setting mechanisms, namely, cascode gain switching and Rbv-based gain switching, and their combination. Furthermore, the topology of the amplifier is not limited to the one depicted in FIG. 8. For example a single ended topology, or a topology with more cascodes stacked on top of each other, or any other topology as long as the right half of the biasing circuit is able to replicate it at DC or almost DC (low frequencies) are also possible.

The following summarizing statements can be made.

An important difference with the prior art is the inclusion of MOSFETs M_{1b}, M_{2b} having the same MOSFET type as transistors M_{1a}, M_{2a} (see FIG. 2) in the constant-gm biasing circuit, which renders the transconductance gm of the biasing circuit MOSFETs practically constant against PVT variations, even using minimum length MOSFETs in weak inversion in deep submicron CMOS technologies.

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Secondly, the biasing circuit does not only generate the gate bias voltage V_g , but may also provide the reference supply voltage V_{ref} for the Low Drop Out regulator that powers the amplifier (or other circuit to be biased), on a same ground domain. Thus, a separate PVT compensated and precise voltage reference circuit, as well as the required top-level routing of the reference supply voltage, is no more necessary, leading to improved on chip isolation and lower top-level layout effort. Alternatively, in an embodiment where the Low Drop Out regulator (or other voltage mirror) is avoided, the same power supply V_s can be used.

A third important feature is the replication of the core circuitry of the circuit to be biased in the biasing circuit, including cascode gain switching structures in the embodiment where such cascode switching is used.

Fourthly, in an embodiment, digital circuitry can be provided to combine the two gain switching mechanisms, namely, Rbv programmability gain switching and cascode gain switching.

It is to be understood that the invention is limited by the annexed claims and its technical equivalents only. In this document and in its claims, the verb "to comprise" and its conjugations are used in their non-limiting sense to mean that items following the word are included, without excluding items not specifically mentioned. In addition, reference to an element by the indefinite article "a" or "an" does not exclude the possibility that more than one of the element is present, unless the context clearly requires that there be one and only one of the elements. The indefinite article "a" or "an" thus usually means "at least one".

PRIOR ART

[1] Section 11.5 of "Behzad Razavi, Design of Analog CMOS Integrated Circuits, McGraw-Hill, 2000".

The invention claimed is:

1. An electronic circuit comprising an electronic biasing circuit and a circuit to be biased by said electronic biasing circuit, the biasing circuit arranged to provide a DC bias voltage to a circuit to be biased by said DC bias voltage, the biasing circuit comprising a first transistor pair comprising a first transistor and a second transistor both being of a first MOSFET type, a gate of said first transistor being connected to a gate of said second transistor and arranged to supply said DC bias voltage, a source of said first transistor being connected to a supply reference voltage, a source of said second transistor being connected to said supply reference voltage via a resistor element, in use a first current flowing through said first transistor and a second current flowing through said second transistor, the electronic biasing circuit comprising circuit components arranged to cause said first current and said second current to be substantially equal,

wherein

the biasing circuit comprises a second transistor pair comprising a third transistor and a fourth transistor of said same first MOSFET type, which third transistor is, at one side, connected in series with said first transistor at a first common node, and a gate of said third transistor being connected to a gate of said fourth transistor, a source of said fourth transistor being connected to a drain of said second transistor at a second common node, in use a third current flowing through said third transistor and a fourth current flowing through said fourth transistor, said circuit components also being arranged to cause said third current and said fourth current to be substantially equal,

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and the circuit to be biased comprises a fifth transistor of said first MOSFET type and a sixth transistor of said first MOSFET type, said sixth transistor being connected in series with said fifth transistor, the circuit to be biased being connected to said DC bias voltage produced by said biasing circuit via an input circuit such that a gate of said fifth transistor receives a first DC voltage substantially equal to said DC bias voltage.

2. The electronic biasing circuit according to claim 1, wherein said gate of said third transistor is arranged to provide a DC reference voltage level.

3. The electronic biasing circuit according to claim 1, wherein said biasing circuit comprises a first set of n biasing cascode transistors, n being 1 or more, all drains of said first set of n biasing cascode transistors being interconnected and connected to said drain of said third transistor, all sources of said set of n biasing cascode transistors being interconnected and connected to a source of said third transistor, said gates of said first set of n biasing cascode transistors being arranged to receive a respective different one of a set of n control voltages, said biasing circuit comprising also a second set of n biasing cascode transistors, all drains of said second set of n biasing cascode transistors being interconnected and connected to said drain of said fourth transistor, all sources of said set of n biasing cascode transistors being interconnected and connected to a source of said fourth transistor, said gates of said second set of n biasing cascode transistors being arranged to receive a respective different one of said set of n control voltages.

4. The electronic biasing circuit according to claim 1, wherein said resistor element is a variable resistor element.

5. The electronic biasing circuit according to claim 1, wherein said gate of said first transistor is connected to a drain of said first transistor.

6. The electronic biasing circuit according to claim 5, wherein said circuit components comprise a current mirror comprising MOSFET transistors of a second MOSFET type and being connected between a power supply voltage and said second transistor pair.

7. The electronic biasing circuit according to claim 1, wherein said circuit components comprise an operational transconductance amplifier, said gate of said first transistor and said gate of said second transistor being connected to an output of said operational transconductance amplifier which has a first input connected to said source of said third transistor and a second input connected to a said source of said fourth transistor.

8. The electronic biasing circuit according to claim 7, wherein both said third transistor and said fourth transistor are diode connected, and have their gates connected to a power supply voltage.

9. The electronic biasing circuit according to claim 1, wherein a gate of said sixth transistor is arranged to receive a second DC voltage substantially equal to DC reference voltage level as present on said gate of said third transistor.

10. The electronic biasing circuit according to claim 9, wherein said second DC voltage is derived from said DC reference voltage level via a voltage mirror circuit.

11. The electronic biasing circuit according to claim 1, wherein said gate of said sixth transistor is connected to a drain of said sixth transistor via a load impedance having a DC impedance of substantially 0 Ohm.

12. The electronic biasing circuit according to claim 1, wherein a source of said fifth transistor is connected to said supply reference voltage via a source impedance having a DC impedance of substantially 0 Ohm.

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13. The electronic biasing circuit according to claim 1, wherein said input circuit has an input to receive an AC input voltage to be supplied to said gate of said fifth transistor.

14. The electronic biasing circuit according to claim 1, wherein said circuit to be biased comprises a third set of n cascode transistors, where n is 1 or more, all drains of said third set of n cascode transistors being interconnected and connected to said gate of said sixth transistor, all sources of said third set of n cascode transistors being interconnected and connected to a source of said sixth transistor, said gates of said third set of n cascode transistors being arranged to receive a respective different one of said set of n control voltages, said control voltages being derived from basic control voltages buffered by at least one digital gate which receives a power supply substantially equal to the second DC voltage.

15. The electronic biasing circuit according to claim 14, wherein said circuit to be biased further comprises:

a seventh transistor of said first MOSFET type, and an eighth transistor of said first MOSFET type, said seventh transistor and eighth transistor being connected in series, a gate of said seventh transistor being arranged to receive said first DC voltage too,

a fourth set of n cascode transistors, all drains of said fourth set of n cascode transistors being interconnected and connected to said gate of said eighth transistor, all sources of said fourth set of n cascode transistors being interconnected and connected to a source of said eighth transistor, said gates of said fourth set of n cascode transistors being arranged to receive a respective different one of said set of n control voltages, said control voltages being derived from basic control voltages buffered by at least one digital gate which receives a power supply substantially equal to the second DC voltage.

16. The electronic biasing circuit according to claim 1, wherein said circuit to be biased is an amplifier, such as a differential amplifier.

17. A method of providing an electronic circuit comprising an electronic biasing circuit and a circuit to be biased by said electronic biasing circuit, the biasing circuit arranged to provide a DC bias voltage to a circuit to be biased by said DC bias voltage, the biasing circuit comprising a first transistor pair comprising a first transistor and a second transistor both being of a first MOSFET type, a gate of said first transistor being connected to a gate of said second transistor and arranged to supply said DC bias voltage, a source of said first transistor being connected to a supply reference voltage, a source of said second transistor being connected to said supply reference voltage via a resistor element, in use a first current flowing through said first transistor and a second current flowing through said second transistor, the electronic biasing circuit comprising circuit components arranged to cause said first current and said second current to be substantially equal, wherein

the biasing circuit comprises a second transistor pair comprising a third transistor and a fourth transistor of said same first MOSFET type, which third transistor is, at one side, connected in series with said first transistor at a first common node, and a gate of said third transistor being connected to a gate of said fourth transistor, a source of said fourth transistor being connected to a drain of said second transistor at a second common node, in use a third current flowing through said third transistor and a fourth current flowing through said fourth transistor, said circuit components also being arranged to cause said third current and said fourth current to be substantially equal,

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and the circuit to be biased comprises a fifth transistor of said first MOSFET type and a sixth transistor of said first MOSFET type, said sixth transistor being connected in series with said fifth transistor, the circuit to be biased being connected to said DC bias voltage produced by said biasing circuit via an input circuit such that a gate of said fifth transistor receives a first DC voltage substantially equal to said DC bias voltage.

18. The method of providing an electronic biasing circuit according to claim 17, wherein said gate of said third transistor is arranged to provide a DC reference voltage level.

19. The method of providing an electronic biasing circuit according to claim 17, wherein said biasing circuit comprises a first set of n biasing cascode transistors, n being 1 or more, all drains of said first set of n biasing cascode transistors being interconnected and connected to said drain of said third transistor, all sources of said set of n biasing cascode transistors being interconnected and connected to a source of said third transistor, said gates of said first set of n biasing cascode transistors being arranged to receive a respective different one of a set of n control voltages, said biasing circuit comprising also a second set of n biasing cascode transistors, all drains of said second set of n biasing cascode transistors being interconnected and connected to said drain of said fourth transistor, all sources of said set of n biasing cascode transistors being interconnected and connected to a source of said fourth transistor, said gates of said second set of n biasing cascode transistors being arranged to receive a respective different one of said set of n control voltages.

20. The method of providing an electronic biasing circuit according to claim 17, wherein said resistor element is a variable resistor element.

21. The method of providing an electronic biasing circuit according to claim 17, wherein said gate of said first transistor is connected to a drain of said first transistor.

22. The method of providing an electronic biasing circuit according to claim 21, wherein said circuit components comprise a current mirror comprising MOSFET transistors of a second MOSFET type and being connected between a power supply voltage and said second transistor pair.

23. The method of providing an electronic biasing circuit according to claim 17, wherein said circuit components comprise an operational transconductance amplifier, said gate of said first transistor and said gate of said second transistor being connected to an output of said operational transconductance amplifier which has a first input connected to said source of said third transistor and a second input connected to a said source of said fourth transistor.

24. The method of providing an electronic biasing circuit according to claim 23, wherein both said third transistor and said fourth transistor are diode connected, and have their gates connected to a power supply voltage.

25. The method of providing an electronic biasing circuit according to claim 17, wherein a gate of said sixth transistor is arranged to receive a second DC voltage substantially equal to DC reference voltage level as present on said gate of said third transistor.

26. The method of providing an electronic biasing circuit according to claim 25, wherein said second DC voltage is derived from said DC reference voltage level via a voltage mirror circuit.

27. The method of providing an electronic biasing circuit according to claim 17, wherein said gate of said sixth transistor is connected to a drain of said sixth transistor via a load impedance having a DC impedance of substantially 0 Ohm.

28. The method of providing an electronic biasing circuit according to claim 17, wherein a source of said fifth transistor

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is connected to said supply reference voltage via a source impedance having a DC impedance of substantially 0 Ohm.

29. The method of providing an electronic biasing circuit according to claim 17, wherein said input circuit has an input to receive an AC input voltage to be supplied to said gate of said fifth transistor. 5

30. The method of providing an electronic biasing circuit according to claim 17, wherein said circuit to be biased comprises a third set of n cascode transistors, where n is 1 or more, all drains of said third set of n cascode transistors being interconnected and connected to said gate of said sixth transistor, all sources of said third set of n cascode transistors being interconnected and connected to a source of said sixth transistor, said gates of said third set of n cascode transistors being arranged to receive a respective different one of said set of n control voltages, said control voltages being derived from basic control voltages buffered by at least one digital gate which receives a power supply substantially equal to the second DC voltage. 10 15

31. The method of providing an electronic biasing circuit according to claim 30, wherein said circuit to be biased further comprises: 20

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a seventh transistor of said first MOSFET type, and an eighth transistor of said first MOSFET type, said seventh transistor and eighth transistor being connected in series, a gate of said seventh transistor being arranged to receive said first DC voltage too,

a fourth set of n cascode transistors, all drains of said fourth set of n cascode transistors being interconnected and connected to said gate of said eighth transistor, all sources of said fourth set of n cascode transistors being interconnected and connected to a source of said eighth transistor, said gates of said fourth set of n cascode transistors being arranged to receive a respective different one of said set of n control voltages, said control voltages being derived from basic control voltages buffered by at least one digital gate which receives a power supply substantially equal to the second DC voltage.

32. The method of providing an electronic biasing circuit according to claim 17, wherein said circuit to be biased is an amplifier, such as a differential amplifier.

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